DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 072 484 CS 500 131

AUTHOR Vickrey, James F., Jr.
TITLE Inaugural Rhetoric and Rhetorical Prescription--An Examination of Organizational Patterns in Presidential Inaugural Addresses.
PUB DATE Dec 72
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Assn. (58th, Chicago, December 27-30, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *American History; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Composition (Literary); Language Styles; Language Usage; Persuasive Discourse; *Public Speaking; *Rhetoric; *Rhetorical Criticism; Speech Skills; Verbal Communication

ABSTRACT

In this study of the organizational patterns of 46 United States presidential inaugural addresses there were four research questions, relating to the overall pattern of the speeches and the internal structure of ideas and topics. Key findings indicate that: (1) 25 of the 46 speeches have three easily discernible parts--introduction, body, conclusion; (2) seven include a preview and review of the main points while 23 have a preview only; (3) few have transitional devices that facilitate easy reading; and (4) the topical organizational pattern predominates. The author concludes that despite the different styles and themes found in inaugural addresses, Presidents, in general, do not organize these ceremonial speeches in the manner suggested by most traditional textbooks. The author ends with his suggestions for areas of future study of inaugural addresses. (RN)

ED 072484

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIG
INATING IT POINTS OF VIEW OR OPIN
IONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY
REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDU
CATION POSITION OR POLICY

Inaugural Rhetoric and Rhetorical Prescription -- An Examination of Organizational Patterns in Presidential Inaugural Addresses

James F. Vickrey, Jr.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPY
RIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED
BY
James F. Vickrey, Jr.

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING
UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE
OF EDUCATION FURTHER REPRODUCTION
OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PER
MISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

CS 500 131

The Presidential Inaugural Address is probably the single most important recurring public speech in American life. As Walter Winchell has written: "You could almost write a history of this nation by compiling an anthology of inaugural addresses."[1] Rhetorical critics, however, have generally ignored inaugural rhetoric as a special form of public address. Apparently, the only rhetorical study of inaugural addresses as such is the one reported by Walforth.[2] Such neglect of so important a rhetorical genre is unfortunate, for students of American public address presumably could learn a great deal about Presidential rhetoric in general and the relationship between textbook prescription and actual practice in particular from an examination of inaugural speeches. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to help fill the gap in our knowledge of inaugural rhetoric, to stimulate further investigation of this important American phenomenon, and to examine whether and how Presidents follow "traditional" rules of public speaking when they compose and present what, for most of them, is one of the most important, if not the most important, rhetorical pieces of their lives.

Since Walforth has previously reported an investigation of some aspects of the content of inaugural rhetoric, the scope of this paper will be limited to an examination of organizational patterns in the forty-six inaugural addresses given by thirty-two different American Presidents from Washington to Nixon. (Four Presidents here are excluded since they gave no inaugural address; they succeeded to the Presidency upon the death of a

President and were not thereafter re-elected on their own.) For the purposes of this investigation, organizational patterns is defined as Wilson and Arnold suggest in their popular text, Public Speaking as a Liberal Art.[3] Relying on "traditional" rhetorical theory, which has roots in the earliest writings on public speaking and which is found in nearly every modern textbook, they write that organization refers to (1) "the over-all pattern of a speech" and (2) the structuring of ideas "within the various points of a discourse."[4] The "over-all pattern" of a speech is its division into (a) introduction, (b) body and (c) conclusion. Internal structuring of ideas refers to use of (a) transitional devices, such as previews in the introduction, signposts in any of the three major parts of the discourse, and reviews in the conclusion, and (b) certain typical ways of ordering the body of a speech.[5] By reference to this standard textbook analysis of organization, the inaugural addresses of the Presidents were examined in order to answer the following specific questions:

(1) Can the speech be easily divided into introduction, body and conclusion?

(2) Does the speech contain a preview in the introduction and/or a review in the conclusion?

(3) Are transitional devices (i.e., signposts) used in the speech, notably in the speech body?

(4) What organizational pattern, if any, predominates in the body of the speech?

It is hoped that answers to these questions will enable us to

be more familiar with inaugural rhetoric generally and to know whether or not the single most important recurring public speech in American life exemplifies in practice the prescription for organizing speeches found in most modern (and ancient) speech textbooks.[6]

Analysis of the Speeches[7]

Method. Because of the problems of reliability and validity inherent in any study similar to this one, a few comments must be offered at the out-set concerning how the forty-six inaugural addresses were examined. Each speech was read at least twice. Then a card was made for each one, on which was recorded the investigator's answers to the four questions noted above, together with any pertinent comments related to the subject of organization but not covered by the questions. Results reported below were tabulated on the basis of an examination of the forty-six cards.

It should be pointed out that different investigators may differ in their answers to the first and fourth questions, for many speeches are so tightly composed that (1) a tri-partite division is not evident and/or (2) the organizational pattern of the speech body may be so subtle (to the point of non-existence) that even a careful reader (much less an auditor) will be hard-pressed to "find" a definite pattern there.[8] Nevertheless, relying as closely as possible to the standards articulated by Wilson and Arnold, the investigator has chosen to base the conclusions reported in this paper only upon his own observations.

Results. Analysis of the speeches revealed the following results:

(1) Only 25 of the 46 speeches (55%) can be or are clearly divided into the three standard divisions most textbooks recommend: introduction, body and conclusion. Fourteen others (about 30%) have a conclusion that is clearly discernible from the body of the address. The other 7 speeches (15%) are organized in such a way that the three divisions (if, indeed, they can be said to exist in each instance) merge together to form one whole statement.

Three excellent examples of speeches that appear to be so integrated that the tri-partite division seems artificial at best are Lincoln's Second Inaugural and those of Theodore Roosevelt and Richard Nixon. Although Monroe's First, Jackson's First and Second, and Taft's only Inaugural speeches are all examples of well-organized addresses, perhaps the two "best" organized ones are those of Herbert Hoover and Lyndon Johnson. Hoover's, in fact, is the only speech of the 46 that is divided in the speech text into divisions: introduction, specific topics for discussion and conclusion.

Generally speaking, most of the speeches seem clearly to have what we might call "introductory statements" and "concluding statements" of some kind that appear different in tone and content from the major portion of the address.[9] However, as indicated above, only a few more than half of them are composed in such a way that these divisions are clearly discernible.

(2) Only 7 of the speeches (about 15%) include what we might call a general preview and review, that is, an indication in the introduction of what the speech will be about and in the

conclusion of what the speech was about. Of these, only two include an enumeration of points to be covered or covered. Hoover offered a general preview but reviewed his major points specifically (although he did not review them in the portion of his speech labelled "conclusion"). Lyndon Johnson previewed and reviewed the specific points of his speech -- the articles of the American "covenant," justice, liberty, unity.

Some 23 of the 46 speeches (51%) include some type of general preview. Typical examples are provided in speeches more than a century apart. Polk said: "A concise enumeration of the principles /10/ which will guide me in the administrative policy of the Government is not only in accordance with the examples set me by all my predecessors, but is eminently befitting the occasion."[11] Hoover spoke that it was "in keeping with the tradition throughout our history that I should express simply and directly the opinions which I hold concerning some of the matters of present importance."[12] An atypical, but perhaps more "eloquent" preview is the one Wilson included in his First Inaugural: "What does the change /of government/ mean? That is the question ... I am going to try to answer, in order, if I may, to interpret the occasion."[13]

The clearest example of a general review is the one articulated by Taft: "Having thus reviewed the questions likely to recur during my administration, and having expressed in a summary way the position which I expect to take in recommendations to Congress and in my conduct as an Executive, I invoke ...."[14]

(3) The most categorical generalization that can be made about organizational patterns in the inaugural speeches is that most of them contain few transitional devices. Of course, there are numerous uses of some necessary connectives (noted below), but only three speeches of the 46 contain numerical signposts in the body -- those of Truman, Eisenhower (his First) and Lyndon Johnson. Of the three, only Johnson used "first," "second" and "third" as indicators of major points in the speech body. Some speakers used "finally" in the body of their speeches to indicate that they had reached the last point, but it is unclear elsewhere in the speech what the other points are.

All speeches, to some extent, include use of transitions such as "also," "but," "on the other hand," etc. However, very few of them indicate that speakers deliberately attempted to use these and other devices in such a way as to make it <u>easy</u> for the auditor (or the reader, in some cases) to outline the speech mentally. This is especially true for several nineteenth century Presidents -- and for Franklin Roosevelt, Eisenhower and Nixon. Most speakers appear to have been content to let the basically topical subdivision of the speech body "speak for itself."

(4) By far, the most common form of speech body organizational pattern is the "topical" one. As Taft said: "The office of an inaugural address is to give a summary outline of the main policies of the new administration, as far as they can be anticipated."[15] Adhering to that general philosophy, 36 of

the speeches (80%) are organized by topics, in one way or another. One speech seems clearly organized in the problem-solution pattern -- Franklin Roosevelt's First Inaugural. One speech combines problem-solution with a causal pattern -- Monroe's First. Five of the addresses could, perhaps, be said to be organized chronologically; Lincoln's Second is an example. Two of the addresses are composed around analogies -- Roosevelt's Third (the nation is compared to a person) and Eisenhower's First (freedom is put on trial).

Most of the speeches are organized topically by specific issue, "policy" or "principle." Hoover's speech is the clearest example. However, a few of the speeches are more concisely organized on the basis of more general topics, such as "domestic affairs" or "achievements" or "foreign policy," the first and last of which, of course, could be called spatial in nature. A list of the topics covered in a particular address would be a fairly good indicator of the political issues significant at the time of its delivery, demonstrating the truth in Winchell's observation that one "could almost write a history of this nation" by anthologizing these 46 speeches.

Conclusions

Unless we agree with the implication of Wilson and Arnold that the usual rhetorical standards of organization and the like do not necessarily apply to ceremonial speaking (as inaugural rhetoric must be labelled),[16] then we are forced to conclude that the organizational patterns demonstrated in the actual practice of inaugural rhetoric doe not measure up in all partic-

ulars to the prescriptions found in most textbooks. Almost half of the speeches cannot be clearly outlined on the basis of the introduction-body-conclusion pattern. Fewer than one speech in six includes a preview and review and most of the speeches do not have clear, helpful transitional statements. That eight of ten speeches are organized topically does not really tell us much except, perhaps, that too few Presidents take the time to organize particular topics around more general and meaningful ones, such as the "pledge-request" approach of Kennedy's Inaugural. Too many inaugural speakers appear to have been content with a mere cataloging of their views on various timely issues. Perhaps, rhetorical critics should take a second look, therefore, at the "forgotten" inaugural addresses that do fit well the textbook models -- assuming, of course, that we want to keep the model, an assumption that experimental research is making more and more difficult to retain.[17] Such "forgotten" speeches would include Monroe's First, both of Jackson's eloquent addresses, Taylor's, Wilson's Second, Hoover's and Lyndon Johnson's.

On the other hand, it must be emphasized -- even at the risk of seeming inconsistency -- that the inaugural addresses most highly thought of by rhetorical and literary critics do not exemplify the formal characteristics usually prescribed in our textbooks: Jefferson's First, Lincoln's Second and Franklin Roosevelt's First -- all three of which are not easy to outline.

Whatever our final judgment, nonetheless, one thing seems clear -- inaugural rhetoric requires further study. We need to

answer such questions as these: (1) Is there a characteristic "style" of inaugural rhetoric? Do speakers employ or avoid use of rhetorical questions, figurative language, concreteness, humor, repetition, special forms of supporting materials?[19] (2) Is inaugural rhetoric really "ceremonial" -- or is it a "political" speech disguised in the form of nonpartisanship? (3) Do inaugural speakers deliver the addresses in a manner similar to that used for other speaking occasions -- or do they change to fit the dignity required by the occasion? (4) Are inaugural addresses more likely to be the product of the speaker alone rather than his ghostwriters (if he used them at all) or do assistants help the Presidents prepare the speeches? Results of inquiries into such areas should tell us more about inaugural rhetoric in general and whether Presidents follow the "rules" when writing and presenting one of the most important speeches of their lives.

Footnotes

[1]Quoted by Davis Newton Lott in his useful annotated anthology of inaugural addresses, The Presidents Speak: The Inaugural Addresses of the American Presidents from Washington to Nixon (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. vii.

[2]D.L. Wälförth, "John Kennedy in the Tradition of Inaugural Speeches," Quarterly Journal of Speech 47 (April, 1961), 124-132. This study, a comparison of Kennedy's inaugural speech with those of previous Presidents, is primarily concerned with the length, style (here limited to sentence length) and ideas of inaugural addresses.

When rhetorical critics do turn their attention to Presidential inaugural rhetoric, they almost always do so in relation to a specific speech. See, for example, Marie Hochmuth Nichols, "Lincoln's First Inaugural Address," in AntiSlavery and Disunion, 1858-1861: Studies in the Rhetoric of Compromise and Conflict, J. Jerrery Auer, ed. (NY: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 392-414.

[3]John F. Wilson and Carroll C. Arnold, Public Speaking as a Liberal Art, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), chapter 8 -- "Disposition: Organizing Materials," pp. 211-247.

[4]Ibid., p. 217.

[5]Ibid., pp. 218-225. Wilson and Arnold outline eleven "standard patterns" for structuring the body of the typical speech, six "logical" and five "psychological" ones. The logical patterns are (1) chronological, (2) spatial, (3) topical, (4) reflective sequence, (5) causal, and (6) problem-solution. The psychological patters are (1) ascending and descending order,

(2) with-held proposal or indirect sequence, (3) open proposal or direct sequence, (4) elimination order, and (5) Monroe's motivated sequence. Psychological pattern (1) will not be used here since its application requires a judgment upon the relative importance and weight of ideas -- a factor beyond the scope of this paper.

[6]This last question is especially interesting in light of recent evidence that suggests that "one dare not presume /that/ 'good' rhetoric in our day characteristically contains the verbal, structuralizing features textbooks encourage." Rodney B. Douglass and Carroll C. Arnold, "On Analysis of Logos: A Methodological Inquiry," Quarterly Journal of Speech 56 (Feb., 1970), p. 25.

[7]The speech texts examined in this study were found in the following sources: inaugural addresses from Washington to Kennedy came from Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1961); the speeches of Johnson and Nixon came from the Lott book referred to above.

Although it appears clear that the speeches reported in these two sources are not exactly accurate representations of what each President actually said, they are used here for two reasons. First, no more accurate written accounts of the speeches is readily available. Second, since this paper deals, for the most part, with organization, it is assumed that minor textual discrepancies will not distort the results reported.

[8]For a provocative discussion of the problem, see Douglass and Arnold.

[9]See Walforth for discussion of this material.

[10]More speakers used the word "principles" to refer to the nature of their remarks than any other.

[11]Inaugural Addresses, p. 90.

[12]Ibid., p. 225. Note the distinction between principles, discussed by Polk, and "matters of importance," discussed by Hoover. Although they used different words, as did many Presidents, they actually talked above the same things in their speeches -- both principles of government and specific issues.

[13]Ibid., p. 199.

[14]Ibid., p. 198.

[15]Ibid., p. 187.

[16]Wilson and Arnold, pp. 194-199.

[17]Experimental studies in recent years, with few exceptions, indicate that for many purposes organization is not necessary. For example, see Frederick H. Turner, Jr., "The effects of Speech Summaries on Audience Comprehension," Central States Speech Journal 21 (Spring, 1970), 24-29.

[18]A preliminary analysis indicates that Presidents, generally speaking, do not tend to use in their inaugural addresses rhetorical questions, figurative language, humor or repetition. But, further study is needed.